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By PR2 Seth Dyer

It was our first night of work after a short port visit to North Island for some well-deserved rest and relaxation. I was in the middle of refresher training, teaching the finer points of EA-6B nitrogen servicing to my PC trainee. That's when the problem began.


It was about 0500, not quite light enough to see the whole nose wheelwell area of NH 500. I sent my trainee to get the servicing hose, so we could fill the depleted nitrogen cart. The darkness and our need to get the job done before shift change prevented a proper tool turnover. The PC trainee had wedged the tools in the nose wheelwell. I had found the wrenches but forgot about a flashlight. I thought my trainee still had it in his tool pouch, so I didn't worry about it.

I finished servicing 500, then went on to two other aircraft on the flight deck. I put all my tools in the pouch, put the pouch in the tool locker, and locked the cabinet. I really believed the trainee had the flashlight.

My day and night supervisors did a tool

inventory but did not notice the missing flashlight, and flight ops began. A plane captain discovered the flashlight was missing when he checked his tools before a daily-and-turnaround inspection. The squadron began an immediate search, notified flight-deck control, and called me to assist.

My trainee remembered leaving the flashlight behind some hydraulic lines. We immediately headed for 500, but it already had launched off cat 1. Several people had noticed something fall off the aircraft after it had launched.

The jet came back safely, but the flashlight apparently had fallen into the ocean. Considering what could have happened, I was happy to receive a butt chewing. The line division's tool-inventory procedures have been revised and improved. We no longer do shift changes on the flight deck; we wait until we can account for all of our tools, and, most importantly, we always do a thorough passdown. 

Petty Officer Dyer wrote this story when assigned to the line division at VAQ-135.